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## ABSTRACT

Three factors in the reader have a generalized effect on all perception, including reading: competence, purpose, and set. Competence involves applying past learning to new learning through transference, understanding the conventions of different types of texts, and transforming the text through the perceptual process into a new entity. Competent readers are able to trace hidden analogies; they also understand the nature of the reading process and are aware that there is no total absolute meaning. The second factor, purpose, includes the subconscious purpose of using the text as a source of pleasure through projecting fantasies onto the text and defending against elements likely to thwart gratification expectancy. Two forms of gratification expectancy in the reader/text relationship have been described as self-assertive and self-transcending. Readers also share the purpose of making their reading public, mediating the text for an audience or other readers. The third factor, the reader's set, is a complex web of expectations and past experience that forms the context within which the perception of the text is experienced; one of its features is expectancy based on past fulfillment from texts. The set involves different ego functions depending on the type of text being read. The set, including the willing suspension of disbelief, is partly self-determined but is also conditioned by learned conventions and is affected by authors' attempted manipulations of readers' responses. (GT)

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CONDITIONS IN THE READER THAT AFFECT  
HIS EMBODIMENT OF THE TEXT

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## CONDITIONS IN THE READER THAT AFFECT HIS EMBODIMENT OF THE TEXT

The reading experience begins not with the text acting as a stimulus to which the reader responds, but with active, intentional, purposive behavior on the part of the reader. The text does not act upon the reader but is acted upon by him. It is taken in through direct sensory perception, application of past learning, and also intuition, latent learning and reflective perception. The resulting reading is self-referenced according to the principles of perceptual behavior. Three factors in the reader have a generalized effect on all perception including reading: competence, purpose and set.

### Competence

Competence is used in the sense that linguists employ the term "linguistic competence" to refer to the knowledge of native language possessed by a mature speaker. Knowledge of language and of literature is acquired experientially. But one's knowledge obviously far exceeds the sum of the data of past experience. It includes ability to intuit, analogize, and hypothesize from past experience to present understanding. Past learning is applied to new learning through transference. In order for this transference to take place, there must be a perception of likeness of a group of codes governing one entity, to another entity. In order to determine likeness, an appropriate entity from past learning must be selected from the storehouse of past experience.

In order to establish relevance and congruence between one entity and another, the latter entity must be stripped of its irrelevancies and redundancies, disassembled according to the codes of the former entity, and reassembled so as to foreground the similarities and background the dissimilarities.

The most obvious and elementary transference is the application of the codes of spoken language to written text. Close correlation of text to oral language expedites the extraction and processing of language input by organizing the particles into clusters, and the clusters into hierarchally code-governed matrices. The farther the text is removed from correlation with the reader's oral language codes, the more the reader must rely on other competencies such as competence in the conventions of texts. The language style in a poem is in some way apart from, though congruent with colloquial language. A special way of using language is a convention of poetry which is a second order semiotic system based on language. The speciality of language points to a second convention--significance. There must be a purpose to a text that is framed in special language. A quality of the special language of poetry is the metaphoric symbolic transformation of objects in the real world. The special language of poetry, such as metaphor, must conform to the convention of coherence.

These qualities of poetry are public and, therefore, at least to a considerable extent, they are understood by those who have mastered the system. In literary tradition conventions are legion, such as genre, literary schools, and literary periods.

Literary texts as well as non-literary texts demand different modes of reading. Distinctions between literary and non-literary are not constant for all periods and genre. Standards for genre are not uniform for all periods. Different texts have varying kinds of expectations which allow language to become signs of different kinds.

The skilled reader transforms the text through the perceptual process and gives it meaning. Norman Holland writes:

The text has a direction; it begins, progresses, and ends. But a skilled reader also gives the text meaning by making connections between all the parts of the text, regardless of direction or position. He makes it, in Frye's phrasing, "a simultaneous pattern radiating out from a center; not a narrative moving in time." As I see it, the skilled reader abstracts recurring images, incidents, characters, forms and all the rest into certain themes.<sup>1</sup>

The reader transforms the text deleting what is for him irrelevant, redundant, distorting the text by reordering its parts into congruence with other texts, and generalizing to his past experience. The resulting interpretation can be represented as a kind of stretching of the text.<sup>2</sup>

Stripping the input, dissembling and reassembling produces an entity which is not an impression of that which was perceived. The reassembled input is a new entity. It resembles what was

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 28; Northrup Frye, "Literary Criticism," in The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literature (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1963), 63-65.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 28

perceived, but is not what was perceived. It may be less and it may be more than the total of possible particles in the thing perceived, but it cannot be totally congruent with it. In the terms of the phenomenological theory of perception, all reading is reductive. The more competent the reader, the more specificity there will be in the reductiveness of his reading process.

The reduction in the reassembled input may take various forms. When a reader formulates hypotheses of significance, he abstracts. When the reader recognizes or labels the text as an utterance apart from ordinary speech or when he identifies the text's utterance as "virtual life," he has transformed it symbolically. When the metaphorical symbolism in the text has spoken to him, he has participated in the author's symbolic transformation. When the reader applies past experience and knowledge to the reading of the text, he has made a transference.

Readers also reassemble input by inferencing and by expansion as Koestler illustrates. The reader is manipulated by the devices in the text for the text

. . . is never completely explicit. Words were suggestive, evocative powers; but at the same time they are merely stepping stones for thought. Economy means spacing them at intervals just wide enough to require a significant effort from the receiver of the message.<sup>3</sup>

Reader competence includes ability to fill the gaps, to complete the hints and to trace the hidden analogies. "By doing so, he [the reader] is lifted out of his passive role and compelled to

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<sup>3</sup>Arthur Koestler, Act of Creation (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964), 86.

cooperate to recreate to some extent the process of invention-- to create it in his imagination."<sup>4</sup>

A competent reader has insight into the nature of the reading process. Culler believes that

. . . in attempting to make explicit what one does when reading or interpreting a poem one gains considerably in self-awareness and awareness of the nature of literature as an institution. As long as one assumes that what one does is natural it is difficult to gain any understanding of it and thus to define the differences between oneself and one's predecessors or successors. Reading is not an innocent activity. It is charged with artifice, and to refuse to study one's modes of reading is to neglect a principal source of information about literary activity. By seeing literature as something animated by special sets of conventions one can attain more easily a sense of its specificity, its peculiarity, its difference, shall we say from other modes of discourse about the world. Those differences lie in the work of the literary sign: in the ways in which meaning is produced.<sup>5</sup>

A reader's competence includes an awareness of his own contribution to the "meaning" or "sounding" of that text, and an awareness that there is no total absolute meaning; every reader's reading is necessarily reductive, not only from every other reader's reading but also from every other reading by the same reader of the same text. Competence is ongoing and infinite.

An awareness of the assumptions on which one proceeds, an ability to make explicit what one is attempting to do, makes it easier to see where and how the text resists one's attempts to make sense of it and how, by its refusal to comply with one's expectations, it leads to that questioning of the self and of ordinary social modes of understanding which has always been the result of the greatest literature.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 129.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 129.

### Purpose

Reading, like all acts of perception, has a purpose or intent determined by the reader. The reader's purpose affects all processing of information from a text. Numerous studies confirm the effect of purpose or intent on what information is picked up in reading. Subjects were asked to read selections for various purposes, such as general comprehension, details of content, details of wording, specific sequence of events, details of physical appearance. They not only gathered the necessary relevant information but also picked up significantly less information on incidental aspects of the selection. Incidental information not related to the set produced by the task assignment was picked up less efficiently than task related information.<sup>7</sup> The pickup of incidental information is ordered by a general purpose: "understand and structure the environment."<sup>8</sup>

Skilled adult readers read for a variety of purposes which are consciously determined, such as to remember, to prepare an explication, to test credibility, to compare, and to read aloud. They adapt their reading strategy to the text at hand. The purpose is intentional and deliberate.

However, subconscious or latent purposes are also at work, whether these are acknowledged by the readers or not. Beneath the acknowledged purposes of readers interacting with the text,

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<sup>7</sup>Eleanor Gibson and Harry Levin, The Psychology of Reading (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975), 397-99.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 398.

is a basic purpose: to use the text as a source of pleasure.<sup>9</sup> This sense of gratification expectancy is explicit when one speaks of devouring a book, or of the voracious reader.<sup>10</sup> Holland believes further that the reader projects onto the text the kind of fantasy which will gratify his characteristic kind of pleasure. He gratifies his drives by recreating his own defenses from the work if possible--defending more or less strongly as required by the particular text.<sup>11</sup>

On the sub-conscious level, the pleasure purpose may be to recreate the personal "script" or identity theme. "Literature transforms our primitive wishes and fears into significance and coherence, and this transformation gives us pleasure."<sup>12</sup> If the reader responds favorably to a text or to certain features, or combinations within a work, it is because he permits those elements to pass the filters for screening the perceptual input.

The reader who is responding positively perceives the work and elements within it as acting out in its own linear sequence the hopes that run from reader to work. To put in another way, the reader responding favorably feels no difference between what he perceives as going on "in the work" and what goes on between himself and the work.<sup>13</sup> [*italics mine*]

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<sup>9</sup> Norman Holland, 5 Readers Reading (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1975), 209, and David Bleich, Readings and Feelings (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Norman Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Holland, 5 Readers Reading, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Holland, 5 Readers Reading, 114.

If a reader responds positively to a literary work, it is because he has been "able to put elements of the work together so they act out his own lifestyle,"<sup>14</sup> his characteristic or habitual way of integrating the inner self and the world outside the self. Holland believes that this basic subconscious purpose is operative with all readers, regardless of competence or other individual characteristics, and that it operates co-currently with any consciously formulated purpose or intent of the reader in relation to any text.

He defends against those elements deemed likely to thwart that expectancy by adapting or altering them so that they conform. Defenses are ". . . necessary adaptations to inner and outer reality, not obstacles to pleasure but preconditions without which pleasure would not be possible."<sup>15</sup>

Self-transcending.--Koestler differentiates two forms of gratification expectancy in the reader text relationship. The first, akin to Holland's primary ego gratification, he calls self-assertive. The second he names self-transcending. Self-transcendence, in Koestler's view is a transformed, symbolized or ritualized form of infantile symbiosis, a vestige of the lost capacity to relate in a fully participatory manner.

Lost infantile symbiosis is available to the adult in symbolic and ritualized acts of the type derived from the feeding drive, or oral gratification. This phenomenon participation

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 116.

mystique is reflected in numerous rites and observances. It is disclosed

"... in the individual's experience of a quasi-symbiotic communion between himself, his tribe, and his totem; between a man and his name, a man and his portrait, a man and his shadow; between the deity and its symbol; between a desired event and its symbolic enactment in dance, ritual play, or pictorial representation.<sup>16</sup>

Koestler terms this form of gratification a self-assertive participation in the text by the reader, stemming from the feeding drive.<sup>17</sup>

If here and now characterizes the self-assertive participation reaction in oral gratification, then and there characterize the self-transcending participation. The latter is remote from self interest.

Self-assertive behavior is focused on the here and now; the transfer of interest and emotion to a different time and location is in itself an act of self-transcendence in the literal sense. It is achieved through the lure of heroes and victims on the stage who attract the spectator's sympathy, with whom he partially identifies himself, and for whose sake he temporarily renounces his preoccupations with his own worries and desires. Thus the act of participating in an illusion has an inhibiting effect on the self-assertive tendencies. In other words illusion has a cathartic effect, as all ancient and modern civilizations recognized by incorporating various forms of magic into their purification-rites and abreaction therapies.<sup>18</sup>

The self-transcending emotions tend toward passivity and self-abandonment, while the subconscious drive seems to stem from a "craving to transcend the island boundaries of the individual, to enter into a symbiotic communion with a human being or some higher entity, real or imaginary, of which the self is felt to be a part."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 299

The gratification of the self-transcendent participatory drives depends on illusion. Through the feel of the book in the hand, through the largely automatized act of transforming print into an imagined speaker's voice,<sup>20</sup> the reader's higher ego function is reminded of the impossibility of total participation. The awareness of the impossibility of total symbiosis creates, in Koestler's view, what is called "illusion."

Illusion, then, is the simultaneous presence and interaction in the mind of two universes, one real, one imaginary. It transports the spectator from the trivial present to a place remote from self-interest and makes him forget his own preoccupations and anxieties; in other words, it facilitates the unfolding of his participatory emotions, and inhibits or neutralizes his self-asserting tendencies. . . . Our latent participatory emotions [are triggered off] which otherwise would remain frustrated or look for coarser outlets. . . . The concept of catharsis assumes a two-fold meaning. Firstly, it signifies that concentration on the illusory events on the stage rids the mind of the dross of its self-centered trivial preoccupations; in the second place it arouses dormant self-transcendent potentials and provides them with an outlet, until they peacefully ebb away.<sup>21</sup>

Readers as potential performers, like critics, share a purpose beyond the conscious and subconscious purposes of all "private readers": to make their reading public. Public readings must be justified, for, as Culler observes:

The critic would not write unless he thought he had something new to say about a text, yet he assumes that his reading is not a random and idiosyncratic phenomenon. Unless he thinks that he is merely recounting to others the adventures of his own subjectivity, he claims that his

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<sup>20</sup> Georges Poulet, "Phenomenology of Reading," in Critical Theory Since Plato; edited by Hazard Adams, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 1213-1221.

<sup>21</sup> Koestler, Act of Creation, 306-307.

interpretation is related to the text in ways which he presumes his readers will accept once those relations are pointed out; either they will accept his interpretation as an explicit version of what they intuitively felt or they will recognize from their own knowledge of literature the justice of the operations that lead the critic from text to interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

The reader's assumptions correspond to the normative reading ideal of "new criticism." A responsible reading is revelatory of alternative meanings, according to William Empson, and the task of the critic is to

. . . convince the reader that he knows what he is talking about. . . [and to] coax the reader into seeing that the cause he names does, in fact, product the effect which is experienced; otherwise they will not seem to have anything to do with each other.<sup>23</sup>

The reader as potential performer or the critic stands as mediator between the text and an audience or some other reader. His interpretation "is grasped in the preconsciousness of the reader by a native effort of the mind."<sup>24</sup>

The reader as potential performer, like the critic, presumes not only to reveal alternative meanings which other readers may have overlooked, but also to affirm implicitly that his reading is corrective of errors in earlier readings.

Harold Bloom believes that

. . . a critical act, a misreading or misprison, that one poet performs upon another. . . does not differ in kind from the necessary critical acts performed by every strong reader upon every text he encounters.

The strong reader, whose readings will matter to others as well as to himself, is thus placed in the dilemmas of the revisionist, who wishes to find his own original

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<sup>22</sup>Culler, Structuralist Poetics, 124.

<sup>23</sup>William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), 249.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 239.

relation to truth, whether in texts or in reality (which he treats as texts anyway), but also wishes to open received texts to his own sufferings, or what he wants to call the sufferings of history. . . .

What is revisionism? . . . the revisionist strives to see again, so as to esteem and estimate differently, so as then to aim "correctively."<sup>25</sup>

The "new critical" descriptive term for the relationship between reader and text, mediation, is replaced by misreading. Misreading is the inevitable result of belatedness for awareness of belatedness summons defense mechanisms against the "anxiety of influence."<sup>26</sup>

### Set

A third condition in the reader which influences the way in which he perceives a text is the set. The reader's set is a complex web of expectations and past experience. Set is to some extent contiguous with purpose, in that it is related to the pleasure expectation. But the term "set" also stands for other expectancies and pre-understandings--for any intellectual or emotional condition in the reader which would influence his reading of a text.

Set is the consequence of learned behavior and is formulated from past experience.

Analytically, we may say that perceiving begins with an expectancy or hypothesis. . . . In short, perceiving takes place in a "tuned organism." The assumption is that we are never randomly set or eingestellt but that,

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<sup>25</sup>Harold Bloom, A Map of Misreading (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 3-4.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 3, 6.

rather, we are to some extent prepared for seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting some particular thing or class of things. What evokes an hypothesis? Any given hypothesis results from the arousal of central cognitive and motivational processes by preceding environmental states of affairs.<sup>27</sup>

The conditioning of a perceiver by past experience occupied the hermeneutic philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer. His thought may be useful in understanding the implications of set and expectancy in reading.

The idea of freeing understanding and interpretation of the prevailing opinion of the time is quite common to us. It would be ridiculous, we commonly say, to judge the achievements of a past age by the standards of today. The objectives of historical knowledge, then, can only be fulfilled through freedom from personal ideas and values on a subject and a perfectly "open mind" to the world of ideas and values of a past age. . . . We read Paradise Lost as a "work of art" for the greatness of its style, the grandeur of its conception, its imaginative vigor--not because it is true. Such an argument separates beauty from truth, and ultimately we see the epic as a "noble monument to dead ideas."

Ironically this false view of a literary text masquerades as the ultimate in open-mindedness, in spite of the fact that the present is presupposed as correct, as not to be put to the test, i.e., as absolute. Yet the present is to be pended because the past cannot compete with it. Behind this open-minded suspension of prejudice is the unwillingness to risk our prejudgements; and past stands opposed to us as something almost irrelevant, an object of interest to antiquarians. . . .

Actually the present cannot be left in order to go into the past, the "meaning" of a past work cannot be seen solely in terms of itself. On the contrary, the "meaning" of the past work is defined in terms of the questions put to it from the present. . . . In short, prejudgments are not something we must or can dispense with; they are the basis of our being able to understand history at all.<sup>28</sup>

Each time-frame is a set or expectancy operating on our perception of any other time-frame.

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<sup>27</sup>Jerome Bruner, "Personality Dynamics and the Process of Perceiving, in Perception--An Approach to Personality, edited by Robert R. Blake and Glenn V. Ramsey (New York: Ronald Press, 1951), 123-124.

<sup>28</sup>Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 181-182.

Gadamer calls the set Vorurteil, or prejudice, in his hermeneutic doctrine. John Hirsch comments on Vorurteil: "The understanding of a text is always governed by a pre-understanding."<sup>29</sup> Summarizing the argument of Gadamer, Hirsch writes:

This preliminary adumbration must come from ourselves since it cannot come from the as yet undeterminate text. What we supply by way of preunderstanding must therefore be constituted by our own expectations, attitudes, and predispositions, in short from our own prejudices. . . . The fact that our interpretations are always governed by our prejudice is the best guarantee that the text will have significance for us.<sup>30</sup>

The competent reader, according to Hirsch, is able, through knowledge of the conventions, and norms, of genre, to make his pre-understanding a hypothesis of some validity--not a prejudice.<sup>31</sup>

The discussion thus far has centered on set or expectancy of a conscious intentional sort which corresponds to conscious, intentional purpose of the reader. There are, however, features of set which correspond to the subconscious purpose of the reader as well. The reader's expectancy is the consequence of his previously having experienced a kind of fulfillment from texts. The reader who approaches the text with gratification expectation, experiences what Simon Lesser calls "a letting go," the relaxation of the control usually exercised by the "scrutinizing ego."<sup>32</sup> In this state of mind, the attitude is

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<sup>29</sup>John Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 259-260.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 259-60.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 263.

<sup>32</sup>Simon Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 49.

"willing suspension of disbelief." Conditional to this state is the expectation that the text will give pleasure and will not require us to act on the external world. The reader in this state is absorbed in an external reality akin to the condition of the infant in the act of being passively fed.<sup>33</sup> "Is absorbed" actually is a misstatement of the actual state of affairs.

"We absorb it, making the literary work a subsystem within us."<sup>34</sup>

Letting go is part of the set frame in which perception of fiction takes place. History, conversely, raises the level of conscious control. A sonnet of Shakespeare engages one level of conscious scrutiny, an anonymous sonnet a different level of conscious scrutiny. The set is a context or perceptual space within which the perception of the sonnet or other text is experienced. The reader set, such as toward a text of history or of fiction, ceases to be fully deliberate. As the reader becomes more experienced, he automatizes his choices of expectancy or set, and he ceases to notice what he has learned to accept.

Even when there is willing suspension of disbelief, the relaxed higher ego functions are still present. We are constantly testing the text to discover whether his expectation of it is likely to be gratified or thwarted. "If a work seems false or otherwise unworthy of our trust, we will become increasingly critical and less and less immersed in it."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response, 79.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>35</sup>Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious, 161.

An engagement of text and reader, or a psychic match, M. H. Abrams' preferred term, is not a matter of belief or disbelief. It is contingent upon the reader's (1) taking the speaker of the poem or selection seriously, and consenting imaginatively to his experience, following it to its resolution; and (2) permitting the speakers to play upon his values and moralities so as to respond to them and their fortunes with disappointment, delight, sadness, pity and fear.<sup>36</sup> Abrams believes,

All these results, however, distinguishable from our responses in practical life, depend in great part on beliefs and dispositions which we bring to the poem from life; and these operate not as antagonists to our aesthetic responses, but as the indispensable conditions for them, and therefore as constitutive elements in our appreciation of the poem as a poem.<sup>37</sup>

The reader will suspend disbelief not because he necessarily believes in the mixture of elements from life as true, says Cleanth Brooks, but because he believes in the mixture as coherent with itself and correspondent with the mixture of elements in life outside the poem.<sup>38</sup> As many (or all) people, according to Holland, recreate themselves in what they read, so many people, according to Brooks, attempt to recreate in what they read a set of beliefs about the nature of the world and one or all men's special relationship to it. In so doing they make poetry surrogate for religious beliefs or "ultimate values."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>M. H. Abrams, Literature as Belief, English Institute Studies, 1957 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 20.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>38</sup>Cleanth Brooks, "Organic Theory of Poetry," in Literature as Belief, English Institute Studies, 1957, 65.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 78.

Willing suspension of disbelief in reading is a two channeled matter, as phenomenologist Georges Poulet has said

"We not only understand, but feel what we read. Mental objects rise up from the depths of consciousness into the light of recognition. Reading also implies something resembling the apperception I have of myself, the action by which I grasp what I think as being thought by a subject (who in this case is not I)"<sup>40</sup>

In willing suspension of disbelief, what is actually happening "out there,"

. . . feels as though it were happening "in here." The member of the audience will make the "affective foci" into his own affects. But this introjection can take place only if the transformation in the literary work is "congenial". . . if it matches the reader's genius or spirit or basic psychological patterns.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the most fascinating phenomenon is that split perception in which the primary and higher ego functions operate simultaneously.<sup>42</sup>

It is indeed a remarkable phenomenon that a grown-up person, knowing all the time that he faces a screen [or a printed page] onto which shadows are projected by a machine, and knowing furthermore quite well what is going to happen at the end--for instance, that the police will arrive just in the nick of time to save the hero should nevertheless go through agonies of suspense, and display the corresponding bodily symptoms. It is even more remarkable that this capacity for living in two universes at once, one real, one imaginary, should be accepted without wonder as a commonplace phenomenon.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Poulet, "Phenomenology of Reading," 1215.

<sup>41</sup>Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response, 96.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>43</sup>Koestler, Act of Creation, 301-302.

The primary ego function which operates to relate the world outside the self to the inner self is the function which welcomes illusion, which feeds the self through the text. The higher ego function, which operates to integrate the self into the world outside the self, is the function which seeks to test, verify, validate, and objectify subjective response. These two functions are always at work in varying proportions. Sometimes one is dominant, sometimes the other.

The reader's set including his willing suspension of disbelief is partly self-determined, but it is also conditioned by conventions which are learned. If set is essentially synonymous with context, the set is really a perceptual field in which the perceiver plays a role, a role which is highly codified and conventionalized. In the presence of texts which we regard as "works of art," we play a particular social role, "a culturally transmitted combination of patterns of behavior."<sup>44</sup> The reader, having learned to play a role, such as reading the passage as history rather than fiction, or vice versa, no longer notices that he is playing a role. The reader is not wholly the master of his set or expectancy. Morris Peckham observes,

The perceiver's role is learned exactly as most roles are learned--by informal, non-institutionalized interaction with other people who know it or who are engaged in learning it. Perceivers learn from other perceivers both consciously by precept, and unconsciously by role model; this is the principal way of learning how to respond to a work of art, which is the essence of the perceiver's role.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Morris Peckham, Man's Rage for Chaos (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1965), 49.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 61.

The perceptual space in which the perceiver experiences a work of art is further limited by convention. This conventionalized space may include the white space around the poem, the covers on the book, or whatever constitutes a context. The context predetermines the perceiver's perception by limiting his view. The white space on the page and the cover on the book create a perceptual space by subduing or eliminating the distraction of other perceptual fields. Consequently, focus is easily achieved and maintained and a certain psychic insulation is established.<sup>46</sup> Every art form has its own conventions for framing in the perceiver's perceptual field. Having learned to accept the framing in conventions of art, the perceiver ceases to notice them.

The conventions of "works of art," such as literary genres and styles are not the only external forces operating to predetermine the reader's set. Authors, working within their texts, also manipulate the reader's response by exploiting the dual primary and higher ego functioning. The reader is led by the writer to an expectation that his desire to achieve pleasure from the text will be gratified. Somewhere in the text, however, the author makes a turn which suggests to the reader that his desire will in fact not be gratified; but a final turn at the end resolves the apparent conflict, grants the reader's expectation, and heightens or intensifies his pleasure in gratification.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 65-66.

In doing so, the author grants more than the reader had expected and thereby increases his pleasure.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Abrams states that the skillful writer manipulates the reader by playing on his "set," for the purpose of having his way with the reader. When the reader's sentiments and beliefs are engaged, these same sentiments and beliefs can be retroacted upon and reformed. Engaging the reader's belief is not an end in itself, but a means of engaging interests and feelings for the purpose of moving the reader towards a resolution.<sup>48</sup>

Holland further observes that authors manipulate the reader's primary and higher ego function gratification desires. The implied passivity and subjectivity of absorption, are inherent in the concept of willing suspension of disbelief. The passively absorbed reader is vulnerable to manipulation by the author.

Desire for oral gratification at the primary ego function level is apparently tempered or bound in some way by the presence of the exploratory drive.

#### Implications for Pedagogy

Interpretation pedagogy has always sought to raise the level of the reader's competence and set, especially as these are determined by knowledge of literary conventions.

What has not been acknowledged is the significance of the reader's intensely personal, subjective, and sometimes even

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<sup>47</sup>Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response, 15-16.

<sup>48</sup>Abrams, Literature as Belief, 20, 30.

idiosyncratic purpose and set. The notion of objectivity in criticism implies that the text as object is supreme--a stimulus to which the reader responds. The idea that the text as object has certain fixed objectively verifiable meanings has been slow to die. Even in the face of the overwhelming evidence from perception and learning research that meanings begin in people and they are conventionalized by people, the idea persists that the object is somehow intrinsically meaningful.<sup>49</sup> Texts and other artifacts, artistic or otherwise, are not in themselves meaningful.

Furthermore, there are entities, such as intuitions and other noumenal realities, the existence of which must be acknowledged even though they are not susceptible to objective investigation, classification, and measurement. The subjective reader's purpose and set are among these noumenal realities.

More than 50 years ago, I. A. Richards set the goal of teaching students to eliminate subjectivity from their exegesis of literature. The school of criticism he founded has contributed enormously to the understanding and enjoyment of literature. Subjectivity was neither eliminated nor controlled.

Modern subjective criticism<sup>50</sup> argues that reader's subjectivity is all he has. It is not an irrelevancy to be rooted out, but a starting point from which to learn more about the literature and more about oneself.

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<sup>49</sup>The process through which individuals acquire a shared sense of meaning in art objects, is investigated by Janet Wolff in Hermeneutic Philosophy and the Philosophy of Art (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

<sup>50</sup>In particular the studies by Holland, Bleich and Louise Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration, 3rd edition (New York: Noble and Noble, 1976).